

# DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER

MAY 1940

VOL 1 No 5 PUBLISHED MONTHLY BY FILM CENTRE 34 SOHO SQUARE LONDON W1 THREEPENCE

- |   |  |                                  |
|---|--|----------------------------------|
| 1 NOTES OF THE MONTH  | 10 THE NEWS THEATRES AND SPECIALISED CINEMAS                 | 14 FILM SOCIETY NEWS             |
| 3 THE MAN ON THE SCREEN   | 11 U.S. FILM SERVICE   | 15 REVIEWS OF FOREIGN FILMS      |
| 4 PIONEERING WITH A PROJECTOR<br><i>The Scottish Evacuation Film Scheme</i> | <i>An Analysis of the Catalogue of U.S. Government Films</i> | 16 NON-THEATRICAL FILM LIBRARIES |
| 5 SCIENTIFIC FILMS  | 12 TWO FILMS OF THE MONTH                                    | 17 SOME DOCUMENTARY BOOKINGS     |
| 6 NEW DOCUMENTARY FILMS   | <i>Of Mice and Men and The Grapes of Wrath</i>               | 17 ANTI-GOSSIP FILMS REVIEWED    |
| 9 DOCUMENTARY IN THE UNITED STATES  | 13 SHOULD DOCUMENTARIES GO THEATRICAL?                       | 18 SOME BOOKS ABOUT FILMS        |
|   |  | 18 CORRESPONDENCE                |

## Ministry of Information

SIR KENNETH CLARK, lately director of the Film Section of the Ministry of Information, has been entrusted with additional responsibilities. He will co-ordinate the creative side of the Ministry's work, including films. Mr J. L. Beddington has become director of the Film Section in his place. Beddington was lately Assistant General Manager and Director of Publicity of Shell Mex and B.P. Ltd., and has done more for the British artist than any other figure in industry. Shell posters have been recognised as the best of their kind in Great Britain, and his practical support of British art has been of incalculable importance. His realistic association of the commercial needs of his Company with the creative side of painting is one of the most noteworthy achievements of public relations in this or any country. He will bring to his new post both taste and a sense of public need—two qualities only too rarely associated with commercial ability.

The Ministry of Information invited a distinguished audience

to a show of their first films on Tuesday, April 2nd, at the Odeon Theatre, London. M. Frossard, the French Minister of Information, was the guest of honour. The programme included one of the best documentary films yet made, Harry Watt's *Squadron 992*. The supporting films were the French version of a most efficient film assembled from newsreel material on the navy; one of the new anti-gossip shorts called *Dangerous Comment*; *La Cause Commune*, a French version of a G.P.O. film on armaments; and Len Lye's latest colour abstract, also associated with the anti-gossip campaign. If this is a fair sample of Ministry of Information films, the Ministry is to be congratulated.

## A Few Questions

THE G.P.O. FILM UNIT'S *Squadron 992* is so far the best prestige and propaganda short of the War. It can be regarded as a first-class selling proposition for the Trade on its box-office merits. It is now reported that the film is to be distributed by



Columbia Pictures (an American organisation). This firm will not take the renter's usual percentage of returns from bookings; the whole of the takings from exhibitors are to be passed back to the Ministry of Information (under which the G.P.O. Film Unit operates). The following queries arise from this situation. Was *Squadron 992* offered to the Wardour Street renters (both British and American) in the open market? Would *Squadron 992* have been a natural box-office success on, say, a normal 75 per cent. to 35 per cent. contract with any competent distributor? What is the rental being charged to exhibitors of which Columbia will generously take no share? Is this rental likely to bring in as much money as would have been obtained by a normal distribution contract? And finally, if a first-class film like *Squadron 992* is to be relegated to a special *ad hoc* form of distribution, what is going to happen to other Ministry of Information shorts which in subject matter alone, may not be able to compete in excitement and audience appeal with the G.P.O. production? Does the film qualify for renters' quota? If so the renters would appear to have picked up a bargain.

### To Hell with Culture!

THE *Daily Express* attacks the Government for giving £50,000 to help wartime culture. An editorial demands to know—"What sort of madness is this? There is no such thing as culture in wartime. Wartime is itself the enemy of culture. And cultural activities, which bring so much benefit to the people in peace, must now be set aside. All our resources must be used for the single purpose of making ourselves safe against anti-culture—Nazi Germany." The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines "culture" as follows: "improvement by (mental or physical) training; intellectual development." Either the *Daily Express* is exceptional in putting its precepts into practice and banishing intellectual development and improvement by mental training from its offices, or our chances of victory would appear to be slender. There is happily some reassurance in the comment of the *News Chronicle* which describes the grant as "an effective quiet response to the brutal scraping of the Nazis' iron heel on the culture of civilised nations."

### Film Council for Wales?

WALES HAS NOT been unrepresented over past years either on commercial or non-theatrical screens; such films as *Proud Valley* on the one hand and *Today We Live* or *Shadow on the Mountain* on the other have, at any rate, given Wales something of a place on our screens. But as regards the cultural and educational use of films Wales has lacked—and still lacks—an organised and co-ordinated system like that operating in Scotland. A Welsh educationist, Mr Idris Evans, writing in the *Western Mail*, now makes a plea for a Welsh National Film Council on the Scottish model; and he envisages its finance as coming from part of the £3 million returnable to Wales under Tithe Redemption. He wants a Film Library, a projector supply-service, a film unit, and a road-show system; and, apart from the fact that a good many people outside Wales are still asking for those things and only getting them piecemeal, it is difficult to see any flaws in the argument. This is a case

where Nationalism might serve a really useful International purpose; and if it is true—as Mr Evans claims—that 90 per cent of Welsh school-children have never seen an educational film, let alone had lessons in film appreciation or criticism, something should be done. The English and the Scots are, at least, not quite so far behind; and a drive from Wales might accelerate progress elsewhere.

### Belated Showmanship

FILM PUBLICITY is so peppered with the more extravagant adjectives of praise that there is a pretty irony in the fact that they were not applied to one of the few films that could lay claim to them until its over-modest West End première was finished. During its run at the Polytechnic, *Dark Rapture* was being described as sensational, not by the professional ballyhoo boys, but by private, word-of-mouth publicists who happened to run across it. The news came at last to the ears of its distributors and the film, ready for general release, now ranks for a full-page advertisement in the Trade Press. If the exhibitors take their cue, *Dark Rapture*, which belongs with *Voyage au Congo*, *Nanook* and *Grass* among the great film records of primitive living communities, can still reach the audience it deserves and bring in a lot of money for some people who deserved to lose it.

### Replying to Haw Haw

IN APPOINTING Christopher Stone to perform an anti-Haw Haw pep-talk after the News on Saturday evenings, the B.B.C. are apparently using the methods of homeopathy. In fact they look like trying to cure the Haw Haw habit by a double-strength injection of Haw Haw virus. Stone—a radio personality with a large following, earlier in Broadcasting House, and more recently at a foreign sponsored station—turns on all his technical abilities of intimacy and persuasion—and a large number of people, we suspect, promptly turn off their sets. For the technique—however efficient—is unpleasant. The sneer in the voice is almost as bad as a television close-up, and the choking little giggles which interlard the use of words like "vermin" or "Twerp" bring the whole performance on to an even lower propaganda level than Haw Haw himself. We consider that the countering of foreign radio propaganda should be taken much more seriously than this. For one thing, style is all important—and Stone has chosen the wrong style. If he would confine himself to the detailed analysis of the Haw Haw method which turned up in one of his talks—or at any rate to a similar technique, there would be less chance of you and me switching straight over to Bremen and Hamburg.

### Confusion of Vision

IN OUR LISTING last month of documentary News Letters which have been published since the war, we overlooked one right under the editorial nose—the American Film Center News. Nor was that all. We learn from the sponsors of *Planned Electrification* that the flywheel mentioned by our reviewer was twice as big as he thought, weighing not 11 tons, but 22 tons. We apologise for both errors.



# THE MAN ON THE SCREEN

IN THE BRITISH film industry the belief still persists that it is highbrowism or bolshevism to wonder if people who go to the cinema might not want to see people like themselves on the screen. The war, however, in bringing into sharp focus the social function of the cinema, is leading to a reconsideration of traditional principles of story selection and treatment. Not only is the Ministry of Information using the film to interpret to the nation a new, bewildering, yet real, world at war, but the public is growing rapidly aware that the screen may entertain, not only by providing relaxation and escape, but by presenting the wartime drama of the common people. Today also, we are learning that films of the British people are our most effective propaganda for cinemas overseas. We may claim to possess in our national armoury the fastest war planes and the biggest battleships; we may announce that our blockade is unbreakable and our air defence equal to any emergency; yet, in the present situation, the world will pay less heed to the might of our war machine than to such evidence as there may be of the spirit of our people.

Only the documentary makers have so far looked habitually beyond the lay figures of screen romance for their characters. It now becomes the task of the fiction film producer to people his world, not with synthetic aristocrats, outrageous eccentrics and the music-hall's conception of the proletariat, but with the inhabitants of this country. The isolated achievements in the past of such directors as Alfred Hitchcock, Anthony Asquith, Michael Powell and Carol Reed in bringing into their stories the British people as part of an authentic background, must now be carried to the further stage of building the story itself from the everyday life of the people.

At the outbreak of war there were signs that the British film might be moving slowly in this direction. *The Stars Look Down* had its roots in the coal-miner's life and workaday problems. Pen Tennyson, under the production of Michael Balcon, was directing such films as *There Ain't No Justice* and *Proud Valley* which revealed working-class people as possessing a breadth of mind and a range of emotion unexpected in a type of character which had previously contributed to the British story film little more than moronish buffoonery. These films represent real progress, but if they are to be followed by a wider and accelerated production of films of ordinary people we have first to overcome an obstacle which seems to present special difficulties in this country. We must solve the problem of the actor.

It has long been the convention of the British stage and screen that the more admirable human qualities can be associated only with the "West End" manner and accent. Middle-class, working-class and dialect-speaking characters are conventionally endowed with comic or criminal traits, or they are portrayed with the improbable eccentricity of the "character" actor. In any case, authenticity of accent and manner is not of first importance. The number of actors and actresses who have had the opportunity to break from these conventions is few, and the rest will need time and new professional experience before they are capable of a convincing performance in a film

of working-class, middle-class or true provincial life. If we are to make such films on a wide scale the problem becomes a serious one, and it is not surprising to find fiction film directors like Pen Tennyson and David Macdonald seriously considering the occasional substitution of professional actors by "real" people without previous acting experience. The employment of the actual men from the *Altmark* in the making of *For Freedom* is something better than a box-office trick.

In view of this new development in story film casting it is worth while considering the experience of the documentary producers who have only on very rare occasions used professional actors. *Workers and Jobs* is an early documentary closely relevant to our argument. This film of the daily routine of a labour exchange, made in 1934, was a profoundly moving account of human reactions to unemployment because its dialogue was composed of the conversations which pass every day across the counter of any labour exchange, and because the dialogue was spoken by the actual men for whom the routine of questioning or listening or just waiting had become a part of daily life. *Housing Problems*, in the following year, owed its effect to the slum dwellers' vivid extempore descriptions of the conditions under which they lived. Even today this film is a reminder of how rarely the voice of the people is heard in the cinema and how eloquent it can be. Yet it could be argued that such films as these called for no "acting", in the sense that there was no impersonation of characters previously created in scenario. The next step for documentary was to attempt such impersonation with people whose actual daily experience approximated to that of the script characters. In *North Sea*, fishermen were asked to interpret a story involving emotional experiences which they had not themselves had, but which were closely related to the circumstances of their daily work and which grew naturally out of it. It is safe to say that the result achieved could not have been equalled by professional actors.

The value of the "real" actor in films where authenticity is the first requirement is confirmed by a comparison of the two recent Ministry of Information films, *Squadron 992* and the anti-gossip film *Dangerous Comment*. The first is brilliantly successful and gains much of its quality from the performance of its characters, who with one unimportant exception, are not actors. The second, in spite of the technical polish of its professional acting, fails to move its audience to a full appreciation of the dangers of gossip because the gossipers of the film never cease to be actors in the studio.

Although the employment of non-actors in appropriate parts is a way of achieving realism, many fiction film directors believe that the difficulties outweigh the advantages. Pen Tennyson used a real housewife with some amateur dramatic experience to play the part of a housewife in *Proud Valley* and the experiment was an outstanding success. But Tennyson believes that, in general, the conditions of studio production, nerves and camera consciousness will destroy the spontaneity of the ordinary person. On the other hand, David Macdonald, who



demonstrated his skill with professional actors in *This Man is News* and *This Man in Paris*, has found it necessary to substitute real lightship men for his crew of actors in the lightship story he is directing for the G.P.O. Film Unit. It is clear that for films where the details of a character's job are important to the story, the professional actor is seriously handicapped. What Robert Flaherty called "the gesture which time has worn smooth" is essential to the characterisation, and it is easier to teach a glass-blower to act than to teach an actor to blow glass.

It may well prove that the beginnings of a solution to the whole problem is implicit here. In the past the tendency has been to adjust story and treatment to bring characterisation within the power of the actor. If he were required to play the part of a glass-blower the scenario was arranged so that he

was never seen at work. In realistic films it is possible to plan the story, not for the professional actor but for the non-actor. The scenario must be written so that the impersonations required grow out of the experience of ordinary people and therefore lie within their acting capacity. The style of dialogue must be based on the player's own natural style, action based on his natural movements. This procedure not only will simplify the problems of the actor: it will give the film a realistic quality which can be achieved in no other way.

If we are to make films about ordinary people the realism must come in at the start when the story is planned. Today it is hardly necessary to prove that everyday life does not lack drama and that such films will not be dull. The material is waiting for the method.

## PIONEERING WITH A PROJECTOR

The Scottish Evacuation Film Scheme by one of the teacher-operators.

SINCE LAST September we have been living in eventful days. For myself, not the least eventful was Friday, September 29th. At the time I was teaching in Balfron, Stirlingshire, having been voluntarily "scattered" from Glasgow. On that day I received a request to attend a meeting the following morning at the Scottish Film Council offices. Here I heard details of the scheme to provide film shows for evacuees, and I agreed, if it went through, to run a mobile unit. A week later my Austin 10 was out of cold storage and I set out for Stirlingshire again on what was to prove one of the richest and most satisfying experiences of my life.

I must confess I began with forebodings, but everywhere I received co-operation and willing assistance, not only from education officials and teachers, but from what I call for want of a better word "outsiders". Many school buildings, for example, were unsuitable through lack of accommodation, want of electric power, difficulty of blacking-out, etc. In many of these instances alternative accommodation was gladly made available by welfare committees, churches and even private individuals.

Each operator was equipped with a 16 mm. silent projector—or projectors, as a battery model was often required in remote districts—a screen and all accessories. On each circuit I had eight to ten reels of film: natural history, geography, travel, and two reels of comedy. Most of the educational films came from the Scottish Central Film Library in Glasgow; the comedies were hired from Kodak. During the course of my service, between October 9th and December 30th, I completed six circuits. I showed, therefore, some forty educational films in all. I cannot attempt to discuss each one individually, but I can indicate the types which seemed to me to be most successful. Only silent films were used, naturally, and they proved wholly acceptable.

Nature films were generally well received. G.B.I.'s Zoo films and *The Tawny Owl* were special favourites and made a great appeal to all ages. *Wood Ants*, though an excellent film, did not fit in quite so well. Insects apparently do not have for young

children the same entertainment value as most animals and birds. Similarly with the Kodak films: *Beavers* and *The Adventures of Peter* (a little fox-terrier), were very popular while *Birds of Prey*—probably because of the somewhat repellent nature of its "actors"—was not so successful. A beautiful little film entitled *Winter* was very popular, but it is interesting to note that stop-motion sequences of rapidly growing wheat and flowers provoked either criticism or hilarity—or both.

Among the geography films, a two-reeler, *Igloo*, which I was fortunate to have during the Christmas period, was an outstanding success. It was the record of a sledge-and-ski holiday in northern Norway and Sweden, and apart from its seasonal appeal, I think much of its success was due to its strong continuity. The Kodak film *Overland to California*, had this advantage in some measure, and of course the "covered wagons" and "pony express" received due appreciation. *Argentina*, *Peru* and *London*, from the same source, were more static, and were only partly successful. During showings of *Argentina* I had been puzzled by hearty laughter at what appeared a most incongruous moment, the scene being obviously one of city architecture. I discovered finally that what was tickling the youngsters was something amusing in the walk of a pigmy pedestrian whom I had not previously noticed at all. Before I leave this class, I should mention two Scottish teacher-productions, *Port of Glasgow* and *Crofting in Skye*, both of which were very popular.

Comedies were rather a problem, as there was keen competition to secure the "plums". I was quite fortunate, however, and can testify that I was positively scared at times by the excitement which Charlie Chaplin, *Our Gang*, and a very early Stan Laurel evoked. I was dubious about sound cartoons in silent form—and still am—but the *Flip the Frog* cartoons which I showed on three occasions proved acceptable despite the absence of sound. In one of these an obliging spider plays a piano, and I was startled one day when a boy solemnly assured me that he had heard that piano! By careful inquiry, I discovered later that quite a number of children had equally powerful imaginations. Later, I provided a suitable musical



accompaniment to certain films on a portable gramophone, and this was definitely appreciated.

I have already stated that each operator carried eight to ten reels of film. From this number a judicious selection of from five to eight reels was made to suit the needs of the moment, the length and nature of a show being governed mainly by the age and "capacity" of the audience. A typical day's work would consist of a forenoon and an afternoon show on the lines indicated with an occasional evening show for adults where these could conveniently be organised. For these, the programme was generally augmented by the inclusion of a feature film like *Grass* or *Mount Everest Expedition*. These shows were greatly appreciated and would doubtless have developed rapidly had the scheme continued.

The original purpose of the scheme, which was to bring to evacuated children their favourite medium of entertainment, was more than amply fulfilled. I know that operators everywhere were given an enthusiastic reception, and it is not unjust to claim that many children were heartened and deterred from returning home by the promise of a regular visit. All the teachers were unanimous that the shows helped the evacuees to feel more at home in their new environment. They helped to break down the barrier of strangeness between city and local children by providing an experience which both could share. But beyond this there is no doubt at all that the scheme has

done an incalculable service to the educational film movement. Possibilities were revealed to many teachers for the first time, and the use of battery projectors where electric power was not available meant that no teacher, however remote, was denied this revelation. One headmaster became so enthusiastic that he collected some £50 in little more than a week and equipped his school with a complete outfit. I know others who were imbued with the same ideal.

My final circuit included 28 schools in Stirlingshire and southern Perthshire and represented three weeks' work—work which it gives me great pleasure to recall. I was only one of some 20 units operating each week in various parts of Scotland. Altogether 1,484 shows were given, of which 609 were given on battery-driven projectors. The total audience was 152,549. The average cost of a show was 15s. 7d.

I finish with this statement of a country head teacher's view, from another operator's report which is quoted in the final report issued by the Scottish Film Council. "The town children who are evacuees are deriving educational benefits from their stay in the country. Why should not we—country teachers and pupils—obtain some of the advantages of city life? And since we cannot take the country children into the town for a period of schooling, the next best thing is to bring some of these advantages into the country districts. Chief among these I should place the showing of films."

## SCIENTIFIC FILMS

IT HAS BECOME almost a tradition in Great Britain for teachers and scientists to make film records of their experiments on 16 mm. Every laboratory and every classroom seems to have a film enthusiast, and the films are used to amplify a lecturer's teaching notes or to record experiments. Owing perhaps to expense one rarely sees an attempt to give the subjects a wider context. Nevertheless, if one added together all these efforts from the University of Aberdeen to the Mining School of Redruth, the body of scientific information collectively represented by the films would be a very considerable one. There would be records of operations, records of experiments, demonstrations of behaviour of animals. There are films to show that the movements of certain eels take the form of simple harmonic motion. There are pictures of a dog's heart beating, taken by X-ray film. There are records of the exploration of the cortex of a monkey's brain.

Considering the number of such films which must exist it is greatly to be regretted that no attempt has ever been made to record, let alone preserve them. Though many of the films are of wide general interest, the maker often does not bother to distribute them, or more often does not know how to set about it. He uses his films to show to his own colleagues, and to help him in teaching his students. No one in the outside world hears of them. Many are made on "reversal" stock which means usually that only one copy is made and thrown away when it has worn out.

The scientific film effort of Great Britain is largely wasted from lack of initiative, lack of interest and lack of knowledge. The only committee seriously concerned with the scientific

film is that maintained by the Association of Scientific Workers. This is a voluntary group which is already doing work of the greatest value in connection with films made under the auspices of science and industry and intended for distribution. But the fact that this Committee is a voluntary one and commands very slight funds makes it impossible for it to undertake the far more elaborate job of classifying, collecting and preserving the films made privately in Universities and laboratories. Yet the finance required would not be very great. A full-time secretary with a travelling allowance and a fund for printing would probably be sufficient. Once the films were assembled and catalogued no doubt some organisation such as the British Empire Film Library would undertake the machinery of distribution. £1,500 to £2,000 a year would see the job through, and this would be a relatively small sum to set against the enormous benefit which scientific education would gain.

One other factor must be considered. Since the films of which we are speaking are often made for private use, technical qualities in their assembly often leave something to be desired. A research worker will only photograph the key aspect of his experiments. A teacher will confine the film only to those points which need direct pictorial illustration. No one can complain of this at present, since such films adequately meet the restricted use required of them. If an organisation for the classifying and circulation of such films were set up, there is no doubt that scientific workers and teachers would be willing to take the additional shots and make the additional titles necessary to make their films self-contained and of use to all.



## NEW DOCUMENTARY FILMS

**Squadron 992.** Production: G.P.O. Film Unit. Producer: Cavalcanti. Direction: Harry Watt. Photography: Jonah Jones. Editing: R. Q. MacNaughton. Distribution: Columbia Pictures. 25 minutes.

*By a business woman*

HERE IS NOT only the best film which has been made about the war; it is a film which sets a new high spot in documentary, by achieving a perfect combination of fact, humour and dramatic story. And there is no petty spitefulness about the enemy. What a change is here. For seven months the newsreels have marched troops up and down the screen, turned out shells by the million and shouted that this was war. *Squadron 992* penetrates far beyond this paraphernalia of a fight and tells us things which matter—what the men who have to fight do and feel, what men and women do when the raid comes.

*Squadron 992* is a unit of the Balloon Barrage in training in England. The Germans make the famous raid on the Forth Bridge, the squadron is ordered north and within 36 hours they have the balloons in position, guarding the approaches to the bridge. From these facts the film builds a terrific story. Starting with the everyday tempo of the training school, it gets, before the film is half-way through, to the whining speed of the German planes. The raid on the bridge has been magnificently reconstructed. Beside this, scenes from *The Lion Has Wings* are pantomime. Then, and this is one of the film's extraordinary achievements, with one climax in the bag, the long procession north of the Balloon Barrage trucks becomes, by day and by night, a strange triumphal journey through unmapped land. The excitement of all processions has been exploited to the full.

For the first time we are allowed to get behind the façade of uniforms and drill and see the quality of the men who happen for a time to be wearing uniform. The film concentrates on a few individuals; their faces, their jokes and curses, their reactions to orders, give the world the assurance of men. They will go straight to the heart of the audience. How much of those over-running commentaries, packed with facts into which too many documentary films have put the bulk of their message, are remembered? These men, who never seem aware of the camera, outdo all the actors that directors dress up in uniform.

The film has a humour and a wit which is irresistible. Until now, humour and documentary have not been on very good terms. The men chaffing each other as they learn to sew, the greeting to a girl as the lorries travel north, the tramp who cannot get his lift, the aircraftsman who replies to a jibe about his speed of working with "We've built the bloody bridge since we've been up here"—these are just a few of the delightful incidents with which the film is packed.

As for the photography, there are some sequences so lovely that I should like to see them many times over. Everything in the film has been conceived in terms of picture, so that the visual

appeal comes again into its own, and sound and commentary take the supporting rôles. What a brilliant touch to parallel the British fighter circling round a German bomber with a poacher's greyhound making closer and closer sweeps round a hare. There is one shot where the two planes roar low across the horizon while below them the hare with the hound after it are half silhouetted on the edge of the field. Many other things stand out vividly. There is the Forth Bridge itself, a gigantic symbol of all man has built, seen across the fields. There are the lights of the lorries flickering past in the darkness to the sound of Walter Leigh's gay march. The music of this film is as good as everything else about it.

*Squadron 992* was made for the Ministry of Information. May they commission many such another.

**For Freedom.** Production: Gainsborough Pictures. Direction: Maurice Elvey and Castleton Knight. Commentators: E. V. H. Emmett and Vice-Admiral J. E. T. Harper, M.V.O. Cast: Officers and Men of H.M.S. *Exeter* and *Ajax*, Officers and Men of the Merchant Service, Will Fyffe, Anthony Hulme, and Guy Middleton. Distribution: G.F.D., Theatrical. 80 minutes.

THE *raison-d'être* of this film is, of course, the patriotic plus box-office possibility of cashing in on the first naval victories of the war, and it has come out not a moment too soon, for the more recent Scandinavian events may well rapidly eclipse the *Plate* and the *Altmark* in the public's mind. It is always interesting to watch the ingenuity with which this sort of production is padded out to feature length; and in the case of *For Freedom* it must be said that the directors have done a pretty cunning job.

The film falls into three categories—newsreel compilation, fiction story, and the reconstruction of actual events. Of these the newsreel compilations are, on the whole, the most successful. They are introduced by the simple means of casting Will Fyffe as a newsreel chief ("Get it printed—and developed—at once!" he shouts across the labs). During the Munich crisis he gets the idea of making a newsreel history of the century in terms of conflict, and we see this run in a private theatre with "spontaneous" commentary by Emmett and Fyffe. Then comes news of the Munich settlement, and the newsreel changes to the actual events of Chamberlain's return being filmed by Fyffe's unit. (Here one notes how very peculiar, in retrospect, are both the looks and the activities of our political rulers.) At this point war being apparently off, Fyffe's son (a poor fish of an idealist) persuades him to make his newsreel history into one in terms of human achievement. Back we go to the private theatre, where it is viewed by the firm's representatives from all over the world. (Opportunity for wisecracks between the Russian and the German, and all that.) This newsreel sequence is good. The plea for peace and progress is made with a genuine and passionate sincerity, although the visuals are a bit slim, concentrating too much on the Malcolm

Campbells and the Nuffields and not enough on you and me. Then there is a good dramatic point when the projection is ended by the news that Hitler has marched into Prague.

The war kicks off with some of the finest shots ever screened of the Fleet at sea; then we are handed over to Vice-Admiral Harper, who compares the stories of the *Altmark* and the *Plate*. The reconstruction of the *Spee's* capture of the *Africa Shell* is very well done, and Captain Dove re-enacts the event with dry and amusing humour. The actual sea-battle is noisy and exciting. But it lacks the clarity of the old British Instructional films such as *Battle of Falkland* and *Coronel Islands*. First-class animated models are needed to give the whole scale and tactics of a battle of this sort. Here the models only pad it out, and add little to its clarification. The *Altmark* incident, badly and almost perfunctorily done, follows; and the film ends with Churchill's Guildhall speech, while the by-now-forgotten Fyffe, crouched 'neath a sound camera, peers down from a Gothic embrasure with patriotic pride.

*For Freedom*, judged both as box-office and as prestige propaganda, is in general a good example of its kind; though it is perhaps a little less than fair to Captain Langsdorff and his men. As a postscript, one may wonder why it was thought necessary to include in a newsreel sequence a palpably faked scene of Neville Henderson telling Adolf that we would fight over Poland.

**Dundee.** Production: Scottish Films. Direction: Donald Alexander. Photography: Graham Thomson. Distribution: Associated British Film Distributors. 19 minutes.

*By a science editor*

AS AN EXAMPLE of twentieth-century social-pamphleteering *Dundee* is excellent. It is simple and straightforward. It shows how a film can argue in terms of modern conditions as forcibly as the oratory of the nineteenth century social critics.

It is the story of Juteopolis, of a town which for one hundred years has lived almost entirely by and for jute, although its history is as old as that of Scotland and it was a town of weavers long before the coming of jute. The industry started from the wool of the Highlands and later used the flax, which the Dundee-built ships and Dundee traders brought from the Baltic. Into this weavers' city came the jute from India, and the skill of the weavers transformed a seemingly intractable fibre into textiles. Jute has meant the prosperity and the menace of Dundee.

The film uses the device of the conversations on a ferry boat crossing the Tay with its complement of men and women bound for work, to give an account of the economic and social problems in "braid Scots", and sometimes lurid, terms. We hear how the City grew in response to the demand for mill and factory hands, and how the women workers became more important



than the men, who were the "kettle minders"—"Marry a Dundee wife and quit working." Because wives had to abandon their homes and their families for the mills, Dundee was one of the first towns to introduce nursery schools and crèches. From the same causes came under-nourishment and neglect, which brought sun-clinics and the like. The slums of Dundee were in keeping with the conditions which the industry imposed. But there was enough social enlightenment in this city to make it take a lead in town planning and re-housing. Dundee is shown, still struggling to overcome its nineteenth century heritage.

The money which was extracted from the mills of the city was invested in new mills in India by the Dundee Lords. Their profits continued while the Dundee workers suffered through the competition of cheap Indian labour. In ten years the imports of Indian woven jute increased by 600 per cent and the work of Dundee declined accordingly.

The film is a diagnosis of this wasting sickness of a town and as such is a powerful social document and a challenge to our time.

The chief exports of Dundee, as the film points out, are jute, jam and journalists. As one of its "exports", I can claim at least to be an informed critic, and I commend the film for the frankness with which it, and the Dundonians who co-operated, have dealt with the facts. The only complaint I have about it as a production is against its suety slabs of synthetic sound.

**The Vatican of Pius XII.** Production: March of Time (No. 11, Fifth Year). Distribution: R.K.O. Radio Pictures. 19 minutes.

*By a film director*

THIS is the fifty-seventh *March of Time* shown in this country, and *The Vatican of Pius XII* is a new variety. The earlier ones which went bang wallop, "Today the world is watching . . .", wallop bang, "Behind this . . .", bang bang wallop, "But today . . .", bang bang bang wallop, "It is with grave concern . . .", were sometimes brilliant, sometimes ineffective. A lot of subjects will not stand a formula like that. There are few which have strong enough issues. Banging the drum louder will help but it will never make an ordinary subject into one of vital importance.

The new model takes its subject for what it is worth. It is a simple description of Vatican City emphasising the Pope and peace. I like this new style. It does not cram in a mass of material and draw sweeping conclusions but clearly and simply reviews a situation. It gives the visuals a better chance and is not determinedly intense. The high spots are some nicely scaled interiors of St. Peter's, a good sequence of the Pope, the genial Black Pope and, over the Vatican treasure, a line of commentary which begins with the phrase—"Europe's mighty men of art."

**The Birth of a Baby.** Production: American Committee on Maternal Welfare. Distribution: National Baby Welfare Council. 65 minutes.

*By a mother*

THINKING BACK ON my own first reactions to the fact of having a baby, I wondered when I saw this film whether I should have enjoyed seeing it then or not. On the whole I think not. Yet before I was pregnant I should have been glad to see it just as I am extremely glad to see it now. Why is this? I think it is probably because an emotional resistance is set up as a defence mechanism against the physical realities that are slowly and surely coming upon you, and you are content to drift on this tide of inevitability, relying either on nature or a specialist to see that all goes well.

The most valuable lesson of this film is that early and regular medical examinations—far from being a policy of apprehension—relieve mothers from worry and prevent complications from setting in which may be dangerous later.

For the middle-class mother, who can afford monthly visits to her own doctor, this film will point the moral perfectly. But not for the working-woman. As a film to be used in this country to induce mothers to go to clinics for pre-natal examinations it fails. The working-woman would not apply the lesson to herself. Certainly there is a working-class couple in this film who consult the doctor, but the circumstances are entirely different from what they would be in Britain. However, this is saying what the film does not do—and it is absurd to expect a film made for use in America exactly to fit British situations and methods.

What the film *does* do is to send up in smoke

the bogies of ignorance and mystifying fear which too often haunt these aspects of sex and biology. With warmth and sympathetic humanity it turns what might have been an academic study into a personal one. Some of the important aspects of pregnancy and childbirth, however, are too lightly touched on. The mother's diet in pregnancy, the exercises she should do, and the clothes she should wear should have been given more weight, and the importance of breast-feeding should have been stressed from the beginning. Why, too, was there no female help in the house at the time? That did not ring true somehow.

But these are small points. The film is a sincere and splendid effort to educate young women in the perfectly natural function of motherhood.

**Canada at War.** Production: March of Time (No. 12, Fifth Year). Distribution: R.K.O. Radio Pictures. 18 minutes.

WHETHER or not this opportune choice of Canada as a *March of Time* issue had any connection with the presence of documentarians Grierson and Legg at the National Film Board at Ottawa, the result is notable not merely as *March of Time* technique at its best, but also because it has—as did *Uncle Sam—Farmer*—a documentary quality something above screen-journalism pure and simple. The material is extremely well photographed—even better than the fine camera work of the Vatican issue—and is frequently in itself dramatic—as when a kilted Canadian soldier marches and counter-marches along a waterfront with a three-dimensional frieze of sky-scrapers filing into the distance beyond him. This is a key shot, incidentally, for the skyscrapers are across the border in neutral U.S.A., and the commentary throughout the film gives Canada's War Effort a special slant directed to the citizens of the States. Roosevelt's pledge to Canada during his 1939 visit is given—apparently with real deliberation—almost violent emphasis.

Recruiting, training, manufacture, and transport in all parts of Canada are duly shown. The Prime Minister makes a short and cogent speech; and John Grierson makes a brief but electrifying appearance in the act of censoring a screen battleship.

## A DECADE IN THE SERVICE OF DOCUMENTARY

AND—AS EVER—ALWAYS READY TO CARRY OUT COMPETENTLY,  
EXPEDITIOUSLY AND OBLIGINGLY EVERY REQUIREMENT THAT  
CAN BE USEFULLY PROVIDED BY A MODERN LABORATORY

PREVIEW THEATRE (R.C.A.) AND PRIVATE CUTTING ROOMS

TELEPHONE: 1366 GERRARD

# STUDIO FILM LABORATORIES LTD

80-82 WARDOUR STREET & 71 DEAN STREET, LONDON, W.1



# THE GAS INDUSTRY FILM LIBRARY

*Points to remember about this Library are:*

## ★ For Women's Organisations

The Library has films on cooking, diet, housing, domestic science, public health and education.

## ★ For Schools

In addition to the general educational films, there are a few special instructional films for science teachers, and four silent films.

## ★ For Film Societies

The Library includes some of the most striking documentary films of the last few years. "The Smoke Menace," "The Nutrition Film," "Children at School," "Housing Problems" are there.

## ★ For All Borrowers

There are 30 sound and 4 silent films to choose from. New copies are being added to meet the increased demand since the war.

There is a catalogue of the films with a summary of their contents.

All films except the four silent ones are available free on 35 mm. and 16 mm. from :—

**THE FILM OFFICER**

**British Commercial Gas Association 1 Grosvenor Place, S.W.1**



# DOCUMENTARY IN THE UNITED STATES

By MARY LOSEY, Secretary of the U.S. Association of Documentary Film Producers.

FOR NEARLY ten years, students, theoreticians, visiting lecturers and critics have argued the meaning, purpose, and virtue of an American documentary movement; but until 1936 the argument revolved largely around an abstraction. Then Pare Lorentz's first production *The Plow That Broke the Plains* made its embattled way into the nation's theatres. Coincidentally, independent groups such as Frontier Films (a pioneer in the American movement), American Documentary Films, Inc., U.S. Film Service, Contemporary Historians were at work. During this same period the *March of Time* helped pave the way by breaking into major chain distribution and proving that the cinema audience, or some large part of it, could bear to think as well as to be "entertained".

But there was a long road to travel before it could honestly be said that such a thing as a documentary film movement existed in America. At best there were documentary film groups, working for the most part in isolation, and too busy fighting their individual battles for finance and distribution to find time to attempt a pooling of their resources.

Struggling along in this relatively chaotic fashion, they managed by the spring of 1939 to be able to boast a fairly proud crop of documentaries. Then through the pressure of an outside factor (the New York World's Fair) people and groups whose individual contributions went to make up the representation of the American documentary film found themselves almost inevitably drawn together. The example of cohesion in the British documentary movement acted as a powerful catalytic agent to the process of combination. The Little Theatre at the World's Fair sought assistance in organising its programme for dramatising the principal ideas of the exhibit on housing, education, health, community planning, and welfare. The prompt shipment of a full list of films by British Film Centre gave us an impetus for which we must remain grateful. A call was issued to a meeting, the primary purpose of which was to secure American films for the Little Theatre.

From this first meeting emerged the Association of Documentary Film Producers, which now includes, with the conspicuous exception of Pare Lorentz, all the producers of documentary in America today: the repatriated Robert Flaherty, Joris Ivens and his two Dutch colleagues, John Ferno and Helen Van Dongen, Herbert Kline and his two Czech colleagues, Alexander Hackenschmeid and Hans Burger. Luis Bunuel from Spain is there, and several refugee German producers; and all those who have been diligently ploughing the American soil for a rich crop, Paul Strand, Ralph Steiner, and Willard Van Dyke.

Obviously the first duty of this group, which now numbers sixty full members, was to secure

recognition and prestige for its films, not singly and as isolated artistic and social curios, but as a body representing a specific point of view toward the film in society. Its first act was therefore to secure intensive exhibition and publicity of its films at the Fair. This effort culminated, in the last days of the Fair, in a special week of documentary programmes to which John Grierson added his articulate and personal blessing.

The second public appearance of the Association was represented by the series of twelve programmes prepared for, and presented in collaboration, with the Museum of Modern Art.

But there is more than the job of publicising films already made or in the making. There remains the task of co-ordination in planning, financing, and distributing. Toward this end, a working agreement between producers and the American Film Centre has been reached which provides clearance for all films, projected or shooting, in which mutual assistance can be given. This agreement operates through a joint committee of the two organisations which meets every two weeks and discusses all projects on the docket. In effect this agreement is forming the basis for a fair trade practice code which will eliminate the waste motion, the competition, and the frequent default to commercial producers which has prevailed in the past. It will also help to bring about the planned production programmes which have given the British movement continuity and strength.

For example, this month there are two films related to the problem of nutrition in production by members of the Association. Another of the "Getting Your Money's Worth" series is being made by Julian Roffman under the supervision of Consumer's Union, the subject being *Dieting and Food Fads*. John Ferno has just completed *And So They Live*, relating the food problem of Kentucky hill folk to their archaic education. At the same time American Film Centre has been organizing a national nutrition committee to assist, with research and prestige, the promotion of these films and the production of more in the same field. This committee has met once and already outlined a project in scope and purpose not unlike the British *Enough to Eat*. It is planned for sponsorship by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company.

Unfortunately the Association has been unable to secure financial support for its activities other than members' dues, which are minimal, so it does not publish a paper; but this lack is made up through the new magazine *Films* and the *American Film Centre News*. It does, however, hold weekly meetings at which many of the most urgent problems of its members are discussed and acted upon. Most pressing is the organisation of distribution, particularly non-theatrical, and the many distributor members of

the group lend their assistance here. A stock-shot library is being organised to preserve the unused footage of the members and make it available to new productions. A production-costs survey for the East Coast has been made and distributed, saving the less experienced members much time and trouble. Technical discussions occur at least once every two weeks in which the older and more experienced members pass on to the novices some of their hard learned lessons. New productions are screened and analysed.

This year a new market is opening to us. The labour unions have begun to recognise the tremendous possibilities of films as education and propaganda. Once they become fully aware, an organised, paying audience of 12,000,000 people is open to us. Frontier Films has just completed a film for the United Automobile Workers which points the way to a whole series of possible union-sponsored films.

The Sloan Foundation film project is plunging head first into economic themes, and already has two to show: the film mentioned above on Kentucky (this is John Ferno's first American job and it marks him for a top place among the American producers); and Willard Van Dyke's on a similar theme. Van Dyke is now finishing a film on technological unemployment for the same producers. Ivens' rural electrification picture, *Power and the Land*, awaits commentary by Lorentz. The Civil Liberties' picture by Frontier, so long put off by lack of funds, is nearly finished, and if the rushes can serve as samples, it will have been worth waiting for.

The globe-trotting contingent is still in vigorous fettle. Irving Jacoby is in Canada now shooting a picture for Stuart Legg on the Canadian national sport—ice hockey. Kline's *Lights Out in Europe* opens in April at the Little Carnegie Theatre, and then he will be off to Mexico for another. Julian Bryan will set off for South America early this summer.

Late in March the Senate Appropriations Committee refused once more to grant a budget to the U.S. Film Service. Whether this will mean the demise of the Lorentz unit it is too early to say; but it is ardently to be hoped not. Three films are shot, two of them nearly ready to score: *Ecce Homo* and *Power and the Land*. Flaherty's material of American farm country is in the cutting room.

There is much more in the realm of promises but none of the documentary group is yet enough of an optimist to publish his ardent hopes. It is enough to know that many of them are working and that they are working together. More than ten films are in production and this time they will not be born in a vacuum. They will have predecessors and successors. They will be made to the measure of the audiences that are eager for them. And in a few years they will be the American Documentary Film Movement.



# DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER

MONTHLY THREEPENCE

NUMBER 5 MAY 1940

DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER is issued only to private subscribers and continues the policy and purpose of *World Film News* by expressing the documentary idea towards everyday living.

DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER is produced under the auspices of Film Centre, London, in association with American Film Center, New York.

## EDITORIAL BOARD

Edgar Anstey

Arthur Elton

William Farr

John Grierson

Paul Rotha

Basil Wright

Outside contributions will be welcomed but no fees will be paid.

We are prepared to deliver from 3-50 copies in bulk to Schools, Film Societies and other organisations.

Owned and published by

FILM CENTRE LTD.  
34 SOHO SQUARE LONDON

W.1

GERRARD 4253

## THE NEWS THEATRES AND SPECIALISED CINEMAS

By MISS D. M. VAUGHAN, General Secretary of the Association of News and Specialised Theatres.

THE FACT THAT the English version of the *Journal de Guerre*, the official French war news, can now be seen at approximately forty newsreel and specialised theatres in Great Britain, has focussed attention on a group of cinemas which can claim to have an influence on national life differing fundamentally in quality from the general influence of the film. These cinemas have broken away from the tradition of the feature houses which show films with a universal appeal, and have deliberately set out to satisfy the special demands of sections of the community.

Firstly there are the news theatres, which present, in the words of Sir Barry Jackson, "actualities and not painted faces," secondly the cinemas which specialise in the presentation of foreign films, and thirdly the repertory cinemas where the "classics" of the screen are revived. All these cinemas have a common aim—a desire to give their public regular intellectual recreation.

The history of these three types of specialised theatre is a story of fifteen years of courageous experiment by isolated individuals, culminating in the formation, last year, of an Association to forward common aims and ideals.

### News Theatres

The news theatres originated in an experiment in London by the manager of a small cinema in Shaftesbury Avenue, who, seeking to attract the pedestrian with time on his hands, devised a programme of news and news magazines of about thirty minutes in length, which was suitable for the passer-by who had half an hour to spare. This was an immediate success, and was shortly followed by other news theatres, situated in such suitable places as railway stations. Then, with the increased appetite for screen news resulting from the brilliant reels of the Coronation, further news theatres were opened, both in London and the large provincial towns. Spectacle on the grand scale such as was provided by the Coronation and the Royal tour of Canada and the U.S.A. created a new public for the newsreel, and news theatres faced the problem of keeping their new patrons when this rich material was exhausted. At that time fierce competition existed between the newsreels of the five British companies. It was possible for single companies to obtain "exclusive" rights to many events of national interest and all prided themselves on the individual character of their reels. In consequence the news theatres found that the showing of four or even all five of the reels gave a comprehensive and varied picture of current events which could not be seen elsewhere and which maintained their attendances. Since the war, the arrangements between the newsreels for pooling material, and the official provision of the same shooting facilities to all, has reduced the number of exclusive items and caused duplication of content. As the chief market for the newsreels is the feature house

where only one reel is shown, this is not a vitally serious problem to the producers, but it has forced the news theatres to seek new films for their programmes. Thus the French newsreels are doubly welcome. There has been a tendency to increased bookings of series like the *March of Time* and *Point of View* which already had an important place in the programmes. The *March of Time*, with its considered presentation of a topical issue—such as *Czechoslovakia Today*; and *Point of View* with its debates on controversial subjects such as betting and the nationalisation of the railways, have a particular appeal to the news theatre audiences.

Following the news, and of almost equal importance in the programmes are the short films. These consist of travel films, cartoons and comedies as well as films of social problems. One cinema has made an analysis of the films shown throughout the year and the results provide a typical example of a news theatre programme. The films were classified under nine main headings and the percentage of each shown was as follows:—

	%
News	18
General Interest	17
Cartoon	15
Industrial	10
Social Study (including films of a controversial nature)	9
Travel	9
News ( <i>March of Time</i> )	6
Entertainment	6
Comedy	5
Sport	5

Bearing in mind that once the most acceptable composition of programme has been discovered it must then be maintained, the problems of programme building can be readily appreciated, particularly when it is remembered that there is a shortage of documentary films of a high standard.

To assist them in their work, members of the Association of News and Specialised Theatres pool their private reviews of interesting short films, and a monthly Short Film Review made up from this material is circulated to members. With the same object in view examples of programme make-ups are exchanged.

### Theatres for Foreign Films

The first London cinema to specialise in the showing of foreign films was inspired by the success of the *Cameo* in New York. From this beginning a courageous and discriminating choice of continental films soon built a regular audience. The public quickly appreciated that in this cinema they were always assured of seeing a film of first class quality. The programmes provided a constant challenge to the American and English product. In assessing the achievement of such



cinemas the very serious handicap imposed by the foreign language must not be underestimated. There are other and less obvious obstacles to be overcome, and the fact that there are six or seven cinemas in the West End of London and many throughout the country where foreign films are regularly shown indicates how skilfully these difficulties have been overcome and what a steady demand there is for films of a high quality.

#### Repertory Cinemas

Lastly there are the repertory cinemas, where the main film is a revival and is followed by a newsreel and by documentary and general interest films. The need for these cinemas arises from the film industry policy aimed at obtaining a quick return of production money expended. Once this has been accomplished a film, whatever its merits, is normally thrown on the scrap heap to make room for the next. It may also happen that an outstanding film will be coupled in general distribution with an "A" or "H" film, and will not reach the audiences it deserves. For these reasons a demand exists for the revival of the outstanding film and this demand the Repertory Theatres are satisfying.

An interesting characteristic of all the specialised theatres is the relationship between audience and management. Criticism and suggestions are welcomed, and in one case a Cinema Club has been formed for discussion and to enable the cinemagoer to express his opinion on

theatre policy. This is an important link-up and extension of the useful work started by the Film Societies.

The owners of specialised cinemas take a serious view of their social responsibilities. They try to present more than one point of view to audiences interested in current affairs and they do not hesitate to show controversial subjects. The educational value of the film is appreciated, although the extent to which specialised cinemas can co-operate with the schools has not yet been fully explored. Many of the repertory cinemas make a practice of informing teachers when they are showing a film suitable for schools and arrange with them for parties of children to attend the cinemas. Others have regular weekly children's matinees, when the programme is suitably and carefully composed.

The consideration given to the selection of films and the building of programmes in direct relation to audience taste is the chief reason for the success of these cinemas, and producers might well look to those actively engaged in this work for much valuable information.

#### U.S. FILM SERVICE

IN THE American field, the U.S. Film Service has now issued the first combined catalogue to all Government films. It shows that 17 Federal Agencies now distribute between them 373 films. Most of the films are available for any kind of educational show, in 35 mm. and 16 mm., free

of charge. While most of the films are designed to instruct in the narrower sense or to teach special skills, many of them set out to inform people about the work of Government Departments. The largest library is held by the Department of Agriculture which has 156 films dealing with crops, dairying, livestock, farm engineering, farm management, lumbering and re-afforestation, insects and parasites among crops and livestock, meteorology and marketing. Among the 130 films from the Department of the Interior are 89 dealing with the beauties of the national parks, conservation, power projects, and national resources and 41 films from the Bureau of Mines. Other Federal Agencies with films are listed as follows: Department of Justice (Bureau of Prisons), 1 film; Department of Labour (Children's Bureau, Division of Labour Standards, Women's Bureau), 11 films; Department of the Navy, 27 recruiting films; Department of the Treasury, 5 films about coastguard activities; Federal Loan Agency, 2 films about the Federal Housing Administration; Federal Security Agency, 18 films about the National Youth Administration, the Social Security Board and the U.S. Public Health Services; Federal Works Agency, 8 films about the U.S. Housing Authority and the Works Progress Administration; Pan American Union, 6 films; Post Office Department, 1 film; Tennessee Valley Authority, 6 films; U.S. Marine Corps, 1 film; U.S. War Department, 3 films; U.S. Maritime Commission, 1 film; Department of Commerce, 1 film; Veterans Administration, 1 film.

## SIGHT and SOUND

SPRING 1940

SIXPENCE

PRESENTS

LEN LYE

chatting about "Colour Continuity"

RUSSELL FERGUSON

as a Poet

WINIFRED HOLMES

on "Screen Propaganda"

Not to mention news about the film in France, America and other countries, and, of course, the usual book reviews and features.

Published by the British Film Institute at  
4 GREAT RUSSELL STREET LONDON WC1

## CINEMATOGRAPHY IS A PRODUCT OF APPLIED SCIENCE

The position of the working scientist, the organisation and application of scientific research, the place of science in modern civilisation, questions of scientific education and popularisation, are discussed in

## THE SCIENTIFIC WORKER

JOURNAL OF THE  
ASSOCIATION OF  
SCIENTIFIC WORKERS

This paper discusses such questions in a non-technical way from the point of view of the scientist himself.

Monthly, price 3d.

Annual Subscription 4s.

PUBLISHED BY THE A.S.W.,  
30 BEDFORD ROW, W.C.1



## TWO FILMS OF THE MONTH

### STEINBECK ON THE SCREEN

IMPLICIT IN every novel that John Steinbeck has written is a criticism of the way people think about the world.

Ever since the ancients said that Truth, Beauty and Goodness were ideas laid up in heaven, men have kept them outside reality. They were ideas living only in men's minds, pale likenesses of which they recognise from time to time in the small achievements of this world. The good people, the true men, the beautiful things of this world are only pale shadows of what might be, shadows of the ideas men carry in their minds. Steinbeck thinks that all this is nonsense. He denies that goodness is a vague ideal with a capital G in the stained glass window of men's minds.

A generation ago the power of good was conventionalised in the unearthly stranger in the *Passing of the Third Floor Back*. Steinbeck refuses to conventionalise. For him, goodness is the truck driver buying candy for the kids. The truck driver is just as much a part of a dramatic device as the stranger but the symbolism is inverted. The old way was to abstract a quality and set up a character who was nothing else. Hence we got perfect heroes, dyed-in-the-wool villains, impeccable heroines—virtues and vices personified, figures as brittle as they were unreal. Invert this as Steinbeck does and you get something different. Make the act of decency the example, the symbol. Look among real men for an example of a man being good—even good for just one minute in his life. Instead of goodness personified, you have persons being sometimes good, and these moments can be the growing points of your drama.

Steinbeck finds his America in 140 million people, capable of good and evil, who spend their time looking for better ways of doing things, ways with less suffering and less injustice, people who are searching for freedom, for comfort, for happiness. He never goes near the White Dome in Washington, or the New York Exchange; he goes up and down the Salinas Valley or along the Federal Highway from Oklahoma to California seeking the real quality of the United States in the people doing their jobs, trying to do their jobs or wanting to have a try.

This is the background from which comes *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, two Steinbeck novels made into films.

*Of Mice and Men* is shot through with what we have called inverted symbolism. It is the story of George and Lennie. George is the typical migratory worker who travels the States, works for a while in a job, draws his pay, spends it, and then takes another job. This week he will be digging a ditch, next week taking in the harvest, but one day he will own a piece of land and settle down. One time he won't spend his pay; he'll save it. One time he won't move on; he will be home on his own patch of land. Lennie is a half wit. He is a large lump of a fellow with the mind

of a child. He is George's pal. They travel together. George looks after Lennie. Don't ask him why. He has just got that bit in him. George is complex enough to allow that he looks after Lennie. But Lennie is the simplest thing on earth. He is real enough and the pathetic reality of his half-witted desire to tend rabbits, to collect pieces of soft velvet, to pet birds makes him a symbol of all the simple longings of the world. Lennie and George have a plan. They are going to save their pay. They are going to have a place of their own. They will work for themselves and Lennie will tend the rabbits.

They come to work on a farm. They live in the bunk house and they work in the fields. Candy, the old keeper of the bunk house, has a dog. It is old and helpless. He pets it as Lennie pets his velvet, his mouse and anything else he can get to pet. Candy also looks after this old helpless dog as George looks after Lennie. But the old dog would be better dead so Candy lets himself be talked into having it shot. He lets the thing he loves be killed.

Lennie too kills the things he loves. This great half-witted giant kills when he pets. His caress kills the mouse he pets, his playful blow kills his pup, he loses his piece of velvet. And when Lennie kills the boss's wife just because he wanted to pet her hair, George has to shoot Lennie just as Candy ought to have shot his dog and not let another man do it.

Steinbeck's novel was nearly all dialogue. To make it into a play he had only to rearrange the dialogue. To make it into a film might have seemed no more difficult. But the poetry of the book is so finely strung, the character of Lennie so terrifyingly simple, the character of George so complex that to recreate all this in pictures of actuality must have seemed to a sensitive director like unweaving the rainbow. Perhaps the biggest compliment one can pay Lewis Milestone is to say that his direction is not noticeable when you see this film for the first time. It takes a second viewing to put the story in the background and to appreciate the skill of the direction, the superb timing of the situations, the mastery of camera movement that puts Milestone among the few big-timers in cinema. The second time through you notice particularly his imaginative use of sound—fingers drumming on a table-top, cutlery clattering at mealtime. The cutting is by Bert Jordan, cutter of Laurel and Hardy comedies, which are among the best edited films from America. Aaron Copland's music contributes a great deal to create the atmosphere with which both the book and the play were charged. Hal Roach has made a spectacular entry as a producer of serious films.

When it became known that *The Grapes of Wrath* was to be made into a film, reactionary pressure groups in the United States tried to stop the production. The notion was that *The Grapes of Wrath* was not a compliment to the Sunny

State of California nor a bouquet to the bigshots of Oklahoma. In fact the whole project was considered a bit un-American. It was bad enough for a man to make a best-seller out of the true story of the dispossessed farmers of Oklahoma, but to turn it into a film was a bit thick. Yet the point for posterity and for many people living right now is not that *The Grapes of Wrath* is the truth about a section of the population in the United States, important though that may be, but that it is a faithful picture of people in search of human decency. A search that other communities will recognise. And, in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck's characters are constantly successful, but not in great big blinding flashes, nor in great achievements of the intellect, nor in dream journeys to the end of the rainbow where lay Lennie's patch of land. The Joads find decency bit by bit. Somehow it doesn't all hang together, but there was that little bit yesterday and this little bit today and may be that's the way the world is made.

The Joads are an Oklahoma family who have been born, have lived and some of them died in their farm. One day they find that the farm no longer belongs to them. Dust, bad harvest, mortgage; and the farm belongs to "the company" or "the bank"—something without a face. You can't go gunning for a bank or punch a company in the jaw. The tractor which runs over their land and knocks down their house is real enough and the man who drives it has a face, but you can't punch it because it belongs to the man next door and he is doing this for three dollars a day. His soil failed too.

So the Joads take to the road, the road to California, where there is work for all, or so the placards say. But there are ten placards for every job and a hundred men for every placard. The journey is one of day to day despair and the full measure of human decency, assembled from its little pieces, is always over the horizon. There is no end to it so the film has no end. And that too provides evidence that little bits of decency still remain to be gathered from the wayside.

John Ford directs and while he has not time even in two hours twenty minutes to let all Steinbeck's characters develop, he faithfully paints the essence of the book on the screen. Henry Fonda plays Tom Joad the son on parole, Jane Darwell the mother who holds the family together, and John Carradine the preacher. All play well and help Ford to put America in its shirt sleeves. The small part players are as real as wet paint and do justice to Steinbeck's observation and to his recreation of the real language of men.

If we must label this picture then it is a tragedy. It is an account of despair, of death, of corruption; but also it is the fight of ordinary decent folk for life in their own terms. It is true that this fight is never won, but it is also true that it is never lost; and that in itself is the victory.



# SHOULD DOCUMENTARIES GO THEATRICAL?

This article is contributed by a specialist in non-theatrical film distribution. A reply will be published in the June issue.

DOCUMENTARY sprang out of a theory. It was not a theory of art or a theory of entertainment; it was quite simply a theory of education. That theory has never really been lost sight of, though the silver linings of one or two passing clouds have outshone it momentarily. There are several things which documentary was not. It was not a revolution against Hollywood; it was not an attempt to gain artistic freedom for directors; it was not an attempt to improve the quality of the short film. It may have been all these things incidentally, but not by its very nature.

The people who make documentaries do not want to make Hollywood films. They are journalists, teachers, an occasional poet or painter, research students of one kind or another and some of them are even Civil Servants. Making films with them is almost an accident; they make them because they are interested in an educational theory first and film production second.

If you go commercial you can say good-bye to any kind of theory you have. If you have something to say, you will have to dilute and dilute it till you could put it all on a postcard and send it out at a  $\frac{1}{2}$ d. a time. I believe this to be a fundamental fact and refuse to be swayed in my belief by *Pasteurs* and *Zolas* and *Grapes of Wrath* and *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*. If you say that *Pasteur* was about biology I give you the lie; if you say that *South Riding* was about local government I repeat the insult. One and all they are "formula" pictures, love stories, spy stories, or what have you. Do not pretend to yourself that *The Life of Louis Pasteur* was the story of a great scientific discovery; it was the story of "a man against odds"—a *Pilgrim's Progress* in modern dress. Do not in other words pretend to yourself that *Pasteur* or *Zola* or *Nazi Spy* represent Hollywood gone documentary. Documentary people are well off their beat when they begin to believe that the commercial cinema can do their job for them, and the sooner they get back on to the real basis of documentary the better.

The real basis has something to do with democracy. Democracy demands an imaginative Government of the people. It demands invention of many kinds; it demands imagination of many men. Till now this has been an almost impossible demand because our rather pleasant Government, a model to the world in many things, has not been trained to imagine and invent. Civil servants have not been trained in the subject matter of their Departments but only in the administration of these Departments. Many people still think that our schools and our universities, as well as our less formal educational activities, are not doing very much to improve the position; are not doing very much to train people to invent new ways of doing things, and little to promote an understanding of what is being done.

In the last hundred years Britain has invented quite a lot. We invented the Civil Service for example, but our social organisation has not been

characterised by enough significant invention to keep us even abreast of the need for invention. Two solutions offer themselves. Either elect a Dictator and let him do all the thinking and invent the new techniques for the social process, or educate, not only the Civil Service, but more and more of the people to think of the social process and to take a degree of initiative responsibility within the Democratic State. When the first documentary people took on the task of public education they laid hands on the cinema's instrument and said that through it they would try to "bring alive" the democratic issue. They believed the need to be to inform more and more people of what the needs of the people (the State if you like) were.

That problem remains today and has little to do with Hollywood and the picture palace where people go to escape the living issues and the issues of living; even as you and I. Plainly enough this job of interpreting social life and of laying the foundation for judgment and new social invention is an educational job, and if you want a lead on how slowly education percolates in the community examine how school education has worked out in this country. We do not even pretend to educate people after they are fifteen, unless they can afford it or are clever enough to win a scholarship and therefore get round the Education Act. Only a small percentage receives secondary education and a smaller percentage still University education. And the fact is that most of them want to leave school before they are fifteen and would hate to go to the University any way. So do not let us imagine that we are going to induce overnight that inventiveness and social conscience so necessary to the successful working of democracy.

It will be a slow business but film, I believe, with a vivid picture of the working of the world, of the problems of our time and of our hopes and aspirations, will help more than any other instrument of education; but it won't do it all at once. If we sell out to the cinemas and dilute the content of our films till nothing really valuable is said, then we throw away the basic tenet of the documentary philosophy.

That is how I see it. Colonial uncles in white stetsons and jack boots at the Odeon; and *Men of Africa* in the schools, the Universities and the adult education class rooms.

And the wartime situation does not seem to alter the position. True enough, the cinema-going public will likely get their fill of melodrama; but if the war continues to be a war of ideas, a battle of nerves, or one of economic strategy, the audience for more substantial information will gradually increase. That increase will be significant. About two per cent, I should say. And this small significant two per cent will not be in the cinemas. They will be in the groups in our Universities, schools, village institutes, and church halls. To increase the social conscience of the country by two per cent, to prepare two per cent of the people for judgment on social international questions is a big job in itself. If that were achieved it would be the greatest contribution which any movement could make to this country. Better an illuminated two-per-cent, thinking about the fundamental business of democracy, than a hundred per cent prostrate before the Taj Mahal.

The true line for documentary is the specialised film for the specialised audience; a capitulation to entertainment value is fatal to its purpose.

## AN EXPERIMENT IN LEICESTER

AN INTERESTING experiment in the showing of documentaries has been carried out in the past few months by the Museums and Libraries Committee of Leicester at the new Southfields Library. This library, which is situated some three miles from the centre of the city, has a lecture hall designed to seat 230 people, and is equipped with a portable cinema screen and a 35 mm. sound film projector.

Six film displays have been given, each display consisting of three shows. Admission was free and in all, over 2,000 people have attended. The population served by the library is very mixed and is, in effect, almost a perfect cross-section of the city's population. On these grounds, and because, since this is the first library in Leicester to be equipped in this fashion, the project is experimental, it was decided that a varied programme was more suitable than one dealing with a single subject. Each programme consisted of four or five films. Amongst the most popular of the films shown were—*We Live in Two Worlds*,

*Spare Time*, *Night Mail*, *Petroleum Film Bureau's Cinemagazines*, *British Navy*, and *Industrial Britain*. Advice in the arranging of programmes and the selection of suitable films was given by officials of Film Centre, the Empire Film Library and the British Film Institute.

H. C. Jolliffe, the Southfields Librarian, reports that the audiences were at first inclined to be rather amused at attending a free show, and somewhat doubtful of having their interest maintained. In fact he was occasionally asked, "Where is the magic lantern show?" After one or two shows, however, their mood changed, and towards the end the hall was often full. That the films were appreciated was evident from the spontaneous applause which followed most of them. Books dealing with the various subjects were on display and were used considerably. Mr Jolliffe believes that the results achieved show that any future efforts of this kind in his library are certain of a large measure of success.



# FILM SOCIETY NEWS

THE SEASON is now practically over. A few reports of final meetings have come in, and several secretaries have sent details of their progress during the past difficult months.

**Tyneside**, which, up till the war, had what was probably a record membership of over 1,600, found that 50 per cent of its members re-enrolled when the Society re-opened in October. Four shows were held before Christmas, and six after. The season has been so much appreciated by members that a supplementary Spring Session of a further four shows is under consideration. Feature films already shown include *Femme du Boulanger*, *Alexander Nevski*, *Nartisha of the North*, *Hotel du Nord*, *Peter the Great*, *The Rich Bride*, and a revival of *Duck Soup*. The greatest difficulty is in getting a good variety of short films, and there has been a scarcity of first-class documentaries. Some 75 per cent of the short films have to take a second run after exhibition by one or other of the two News Theatres in the city of Newcastle. From an administrative point of view, the most important event has been the conversion of the Society into a Company limited by guarantee. This has cost a bit in lawyer's fees, etc., but it believed that the right thing was done in placing the affairs of the Society on a firm legal footing, which is of particular importance in these uncertain times. The affairs of the Tyneside Film Society which, of course, continues to exist, are governed by the Tyneside Film Association Limited, of which M. C. Pottinger has been elected chairman. This is a non-profit-making company, of course, but the essence of the Articles of Association is that should the Society be obliged to wind up for any unforeseen reason, the liability of all members is limited to 5s. The Tyneside Film Society's offspring, the Northern Counties Children's Cinema Council, has unfortunately, with the evacuation of most of the teaching profession from the city, suffered a relapse. It was, in any case, very hard hit by the death of Ernest Dyer, who was its mainspring and founder.

The last performance of the **Dundee and St. Andrews** Season included the feature film *Deuxième Bureau*.

The **Edinburgh Film Guild** reports that a season successful both in membership and in programmes ended on March 17, when the programme consisted of *Wings Over Empire*, *Swinging the Lambeth Walk*, *The First Days*, *Goofy and Wilbur* and *La Tendre Ennemie*. This was, incidentally, the first and, so far, the only performance of *The First Days* in Edinburgh.

The April performance of the **Manchester and Salford Film Society** included *Drame de Shanghai* (Pabst), *Swinging the Lambeth Walk* (Len Lye), and *The City* (Ralph Elton). The secretary of this Society has also sent in a number of suggestions for the improvement of this page, most of which are being acted upon.

The **London Scientific Film Society** completed its season on Sunday, March 31st, with a programme illustrating the origins of science. The films were *Mr Tedham Makes a Wheel* (excerpt from *Shell Cinemagazine No. 3*), *Pêcheurs*

*d'Oiseaux*, *Men of Africa* (Wright and Shaw), and *Dark Rapture*. Arthur Elton addressed the meeting in the interval, and reported that, in spite of the war, the season had been a very successful one financially. An initial deficit of £30 had been reduced to a very small amount. Mr Elton said that in war-time it was necessary to preserve the cultural decencies of life and that such essentials were only too often pushed aside and forgotten in the hurly-burly of a war effort. The Committee proposed to do its utmost to keep the Society running next year.

The **Belfast Film Institute Society** reports that April was a month of exceptional activity. On the 9th a very large audience attended a show of 16 mm. films—an early Chaplin, *Behind the Scenes*, and Fanck and Pabst's *White Hell of Pitz Palu*. The success of this meeting makes it probable that a similar one will be held this month. At the third 35 mm. show of the season the feature was *Peter the Great*, with a supporting programme of a Disney and a documentary. The success of the previous shows has been such that although a season of only three shows was intended, a fourth is being arranged for a date in May. A further meeting was held to illustrate the use of the Film in Education. *North Sea* was shown as an example of "Background" film, with a special talk on the use of documentary in schools. In addition, examples of short teaching films were shown, and there was also a demonstration lesson to a class from a public elementary school.

To keep interest in the Society alive it is intended, contrary to usual custom, to continue publication of the Society's Film Review right into the summer.

## Enterprise at Glasgow

Film Societies will be interested in an experiment (reported in *The Scotsman*) which was conducted in the Cosmo Cinema, Glasgow, on Wednesday, April 10th, when an audience composed of members of H.M. Forces saw a programme of French films. Its purpose was to give the men an impression of the life and environment of the French people, and arrangements may be made to send similar programmes on circuit to areas where members of the Forces are stationed. The performance was given by the Scottish Film Council in co-operation with the French Ministry of Information and the Education Officer of the Scottish Command.

## Histories

[This new feature will present each month a historical resumé of the progress of various Film Societies.]

### No. 1. Manchester and Salford

The Film Society movement in the Manchester district, dates back to 1930, when the Salford Workers Film Society was formed with Tom Cavanagh as Hon. Secretary, and Reg Cordwell as Hon. Organiser. Later Manchester was added

to the title, and in 1937, the Society was re-organised as the Manchester and Salford Film Society.

Created without financial support of the industry and armed only with an urge for progress through the medium of films, it has overcome all the obstacles of authority and trade, and established itself firmly as a permanent and exciting feature of the cultural life of Manchester's winter season. The fact that its private film displays have been held at no less than nine cinemas, is a story in itself of some of the difficulties that had to be overcome. The establishment of precedents, and the increased information services now available, do however simplify the problems of new societies.

The Manchester and Salford Society has always had one of the largest memberships in the movement, and probably the lowest subscription. It has always been to the fore at Film Society conferences in support of the need of federation. As an independent progressive organisation, controlled entirely by its members, and administered by voluntary service, it has commanded the attention and support of many influential citizens, particularly those active in social and educational work. Its members can be found residing in many towns throughout Lancashire and Cheshire, in addition to a number of Yorkshire members. In spite of wartime difficulties, the Society continues to progress.

The Secretary is R. Cordwell, and the Treasurer is F. J. Stevenson.

## Editorial Note

Although the season is over, we do not intend to curtail this page. It is proposed during the summer months to run a series of articles of general interest to Film Societies. Subjects will include "Programme-building", "How to Start a Film Society", "Booking Problems", "The Film Societies in Wartime", "What Substitutes for Foreign Films"?

A full report of the Scottish Amateur Film Festival, which was held at the end of April, will appear in the next issue.

The reviews of foreign films will also be continued throughout the summer.

## NEWS VIA AMERICA

(From the U.S. Department of Commerce Bulletin)

THE GERMAN schools now own 36,000 motion projectors. This compares with 29,000 a year ago. Since there are approximately 50,000 schools in Germany, this means about 85 per cent are now equipped.

Sweden was rapidly developing as an outlet for educational motion picture films and equipment before the outbreak of war, but at present there is but little business in 16 mm. film. A reliable estimate is that some 1,000 public schools are equipped with projectors. Most of the films shown are of Swedish or German origin, with a scattering of American origin.



## REVIEWS OF FOREIGN FILMS

(All films recommended on this page are the latest continentals viewable in London, and are, in our opinion, suitable for Film Society showing. We are unable to indicate at what dates they will be available for booking.)

**La Tragédie Impériale.** Direction: Marcel l'Herbier. Actors: Harry Baur, Marcelle Chantal, Pierre-Richard Willm, Jean Worms. Distribution: European Films Ltd.

RASPUTIN rears his ugly head again, uglier than ever. He seems to be as difficult to extinguish on the screen as he was in actual life. This time the man beneath the beard is Harry Baur. It doesn't matter whether his interpretation of the mad monk is historically accurate or not—Rasputin passed more quickly into legend than any other man. It is, at any rate, plausible. We can believe far more easily in a superstitious peasant whose creed is that life is incomplete without sin, and whose rustic common sense gives him sufficient human understanding to perform what seem to be miracles, than we can in a mystic and machiavellian prophet of the steppes, who is Conrad Veidt and there's no getting away from it. Apart from Harry Baur, the film is nowhere quite in the first class. The direction is always thoughtful, but never brilliant. There is a big patch in the middle of the film which is uneventful and slow. The supporting cast do little more than sketch in a background which is recognisable as the

Romanoff Court, although Marcelle Chantal's Tsarina sometimes comes to life as a naïve and sincere woman bordering on religious mania. Jean Worms' make-up makes him the dead spit of the Tsar, but then Mme Tussaud's waxworks have done as well as that before now. Law report addicts will be disappointed to know that no libel suits are likely to arise from this film, for the only characters based on real people are those of the royal family and of Rasputin himself. Their surviving relations, if any, are unlikely to bring actions. The man who kills Rasputin is a fictitious nobleman, and is played by Pierre-Richard Willm.

**Les Mutinés de l'Elseleur.** Direction: Christian Stengel. Actors: Jean Murat, Winna Winfried, André Berley, René Bergeron. Distribution: Associated British.

FORMULA pictures and hokum don't all come from Hollywood. There is a good lacing of both in this film. The formula is the French one, the only essential ingredient of which is that you have to have a sex maniac in the cast. He need not have much to do, just so long as he appears now and again to relieve the tedium and give the story verisimilitude. The hokum is supplied by Winna Winfried, *très chic* and *très sport* as the captain's blonde niece on the four-masted clipper, who has a chromium-fitted dressing-table in her cabin,

provides the excuse for the sex-maniac, and can show a pretty style with a sextant when the need arises. She also helps to occupy the time of the hero of the film, a journalist played by Jean Murat, who would be quite at a loose end without her. All this is only sufferable because it goes on in a foreign language. The reason for recommending the film is that the real story has nothing to do with captains' nieces and journalists and has some genuine excitement in it. The crew of the *Elsinore* is made up of a score or so assorted gaolbirds, controlled by the first and second mate. The first mate is a sort of Captain Bligh without the sadism. His excuse for what brutality he commits is that to sail a four-master you have to be hard. And so it seems. He is played by André Berley, who makes him look like a big, unshaven toad. The second mate is a shifty, subversive individual, who gambles with the crew, steals money from the journalist, and ends up by knifing the captain. René Bergeron, with his long nose and the cigarette in the corner of his surly mouth, makes him a real and understandable character. After the death of the captain, the gaolbirds mutiny, but are finally quelled. There is a storm too, of course, but it is better than usual because it has all been shot on the spot in the documentary manner, even including some of the dialogue scenes. The cameramen must have deserved the Legion of Honour.

## A MAGAZINE OF DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

**FILMS:** A New Quarterly Edited by Jay Leyda 2 Dollars a Year

Published by Kamin Publishers 15 West 56th Street New York NY

The Second Number Contains: Collaboration in Documentary by Joris Ivens: Life Goes to the Pictures by Otis Ferguson: Film Music of the Quarter by Kurt London: A Channel For Democratic Thought by Philip Sterling: Film Problems of the Quarter: Literature of the Film

**FILMS**

FOREIGN SUBSCRIPTION 3 DOLLARS A YEAR NO. 2 SPRING 1940



## NON-THEATRICAL FILM LIBRARIES

Borrowers of films are asked to apply as much in advance as possible, to give alternative booking dates, and to return the films immediately after use.

H. A hire charge is made.  
F. Free distribution to approved borrowers.  
Sd. Sound. St. Silent.

**Association of Scientific Workers**, 30 Bedford Row, W.C.1. Scientific Film Committee. *Graded List of Films*. A list of scientific films from many sources, and their distributors, classified and graded for various types of audience. On request, Committee will give advice on programme make-up and choice of films to prospective users.

**British Commercial Gas Association**, Gas Industry House, 1 Grosvenor Place, S.W.1. Films on social subjects, domestic science, & the manufacture of gas. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & a few St. F.

**British Council Film Department**, 25 Savile Row, W.1. *Films of Britain*, 1940. This catalogue is for overseas use only but provides useful synopses of at least a 100 sound & silent documentary films.

**British Film Institute**, 4 Great Russell Street, W.C.1. (a) *National Film Library*. An important collection of documentary & other films. Available only to full members of B.F.I. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & St. H. (b) *Some British and Foreign Documentary and other Short Films*. A general list of films & distributors. (c) *Early Films*. A list of early films still available in Britain.

**Crookes' Laboratories**, Gorst Road, Park Royal, N.W.10. *Colloids in Medicine*. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. F.

**Dartington Hall Film Unit**, Totnes, South Devon. Classroom films on regional and economic geography. 16 mm. St. H.

**Educational General Services**, Little Holt, Merton Lane, Highgate, N.6. A wide selection of films of all kinds, particularly of overseas interest. Some prints for outright sale. 16 mm. Sd. & St. H.

**Electrical Development Association**, 2 Savoy Hill, Strand, W.C.2. Four films of electrical interest. Further films of direct advertising appeal are available only through members of the Association. 16 mm. Sd. & St. F.

**Empire Film Library**, Imperial Institute, S.W.7. Films primarily of Empire interest. With a useful subject index. 16 mm. & a few 35 mm. Sd. & St. F.

**Ensign Film Library**, 88-89 High Holborn, London, W.C.1. Wide selection of all types of films including fiction, comedies, documentaries, films of geography, animal life, industry. Some prints for outright sale. 16 mm. St. & a few Sd. H.

**Film Centre**, 34 Soho Square, W.1. *Mouvements Vibratoires*. A film on simple harmonic motion. French captions. 34 mm. & 16 mm. St. H.

**Gaumont-British Equipments**, Film House, Wardour Street, W.1. Many films on scientific subjects, geography, hygiene, history, language, natural history, sport. Also feature films. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & St. H.

**G.P.O. Film Library**, Imperial Institute, S.W.7. Over 100 films, mostly centred round communications, 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & St. F.

**Kodak, Ltd.**, Kingsway, W.C.2. (a) *Kodascope Library*. Instructional, documentary, feature, western, comedy, Strong on early American comedies. 16 mm. & 8 mm., St. H. (A separate *List of Educational Films*, extracted from the above, is also published. A number of films have teaching notes.) (b) *Medical Film Library*. Circulation restricted to members of medical profession. Some colour films. Some prints for outright sale. 16 mm. St. H.

**March of Time**, Dean House, 4 Dean Street, W.1. Selected *March of Time* items of general

interest. Includes *Inside Nazi Germany*, *New Schools for Old*, *America Thinks it Over*. 16 mm. Sd. H.

**Mathematical Films**. Available from B. G. D. Salt, 5 Carlingford Road, Hampstead, N.W.3. Five mathematical films suitable for senior classes. 16 mm. & 9.5 mm. St. H.

**Metropolitan-Vickers Electrical Co. Ltd.**, Trafford Park, Manchester 17. *Planned Electrification*, a film on the electrification of the winding & surface gear in a coal mine. Available for showing to technical & educational groups. 16 mm. Sd. F.

**Pathescope**, North Circular Road, Cricklewood, N.W.2. Wide selection of silent films, including cartoons, comedies, drama, documentary, travel, sport. Also good selection of early American & German films. 9.5 mm. Sd. & St. H.

**Petroleum Films Bureau**, 15 Hay Hill, Berkeley Square, W.1. Twenty technical & documentary films. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & St. F.

**Religious Film Library**, 104 High Holborn, W.C.1. Films of religious and temperance appeal, also list of supporting films from other sources. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & St. H.

**Scottish Central Film Library**, 2 Newton Place, Charing Cross, Glasgow, C.3. A wide selection of teaching films from many sources. Contains some silent Scots films not available elsewhere. Library available to groups in Scotland only. 16 mm. Sd. & St. H.

**Sound-Film Services**, 10 Park Place, Cardiff. Library of selected films including Massingham's *And So to Work* & Pollard's *Dragon of Wales*. *Rome* and *Sahara* have French commentaries. 16 mm. Sd. H.

**Southern Railway**, General Manager's Office, Waterloo Station, S.E.1. Seven films (one in colour) including *Building an Electric Coach*, *South African Fruit* (Southampton Docks to Covent Garden), & films on seaside towns, 16 mm. St. F.

**Strand Film Company**, 5A Upper St. Martin's Lane, W.C.2. Eleven films available for non-theatrical distribution including *Aerial Milestones* (historical survey of British civil aviation) *Chapter and Verse* (survey of books and writers), *Give the Kids a Break*, & a number of others of Empire and general interest, including 3 silent Airways films. Mostly 35 mm. Sd. A few 16 mm. St. F.

**Wallace Heaton, Ltd.**, 127 New Bond Street, W.1. Three catalogues. Sound 16 mm., silent 16 mm., silent 9.5 mm. The sound film catalogue contains a number of American feature films, including *Thunder Over Mexico*, & some interest shorts. The silent 16 mm. catalogue contains a first-class list of early American, German & Russian silent features and shorts. The 9.5 catalogue has a number of early German films & a wide selection of early American & English slapstick comedies. 16 mm. & 9.5 mm. Sd. & St. H.

**Workers' Film Association**, 145 Wardour Street, W.1. Films of democratic & co-operative interest, with a selection of films from other sources. Notes & suggestions for complete programmes. Some prints for outright sale. 35 mm. & 16 mm. Sd. & St. H.

## CATALOGUE OF THE MONTH

**Films about Oil**. February, 1940. Post free, from the Petroleum Films Bureau, 15 Hay Hill, Berkeley Square, London, W.1.

THE FILMS issued by the Petroleum Films Bureau are a remarkable example of what can be done under the aegis of enlightened commercial firms. Judging from those films which this reviewer has seen, their technical quality is high, their production displays originality and imagination, their educational value is undoubted. But, above all, they are commendably free of advertising. Teachers—especially those of science and geography—would find them extremely useful and entirely suitable.

The catalogue lists twenty films (fifteen sound, five silent), including four cinemagazines, each consisting of three short items. They are divided into three groups headed *How Oil is Produced*, *How People Use Oil*, and *How Motor Cars Work*. For each film a description of the contents—some five or six hundred words—is given. These synopses are clearly and attractively written—after seeing the films they describe one realises how accurate they are. They are certainly

sufficient to enable the secretary of a society to decide whether he should book the films or not. But it is less certain that they are adequate for teachers who do not want merely to *show* them, but above all to *use* them in connection with a carefully planned syllabus of lessons.

For even after reading carefully any of the descriptions given, one is still not quite sure of the answers to questions like the following:—What was the main aim which the producer had in mind? What standard of knowledge did he assume? Was the film primarily for adults, or was it for technical students, or for secondary schools where pupils have learned science, or for senior school children? Does the film stress chiefly industrial operations, or does it concentrate on the scientific principles that underlie them? Does P.F.B. recommend it as a general background film or as a direct instructional film? These remarks, however, are not intended as a criticism of the excellent P.F.B. Catalogue. They should be interpreted as a plea for the provision of Teacher's Handbooks to accompany all films intended for school use.



## SOME DOCUMENTARY BOOKINGS

(The following bookings for May are selected from a list covering its members supplied by The News and Specialised Theatres Association.)

<b>Animal Legends</b>		
News Cinema, Aberdeen	May	6th
Classic Cinema, Upper Tooting Road, London	"	9th
<b>The City</b>		
News Theatre, Leeds	May	6th
<b>Keep Fit</b>		
Tatler Theatre, Leeds	May	6th
<b>March of Time No. 10</b>		
Classic Cinema, Southampton	May	19th
Classic Cinema, South Croydon	"	16th
Classic Cinema, Upper Tooting Road, London	"	5th
News Theatre, Nottingham	"	6th
Worlds News Theatre, Praed Street, London	"	23rd
<b>March of Time No. 11</b>		
News Cinema, Aberdeen	May	13th
<b>March of Time No. 12</b>		
Tatler News Theatre, Liverpool	May	20th
News Theatre, Newcastle	"	27th
Academy Cinema, Oxford Street, London	May	6th
Tatler Theatre, Manchester	May	27th
<b>March of Time No. 13</b>		
Eros (Piccadilly), Victoria Station, Waterloo Station News Theatres, London	May	6th
<b>Men in Danger</b>		
News Theatre, Leeds	May	20th
<b>Point of View No. 2</b>		
News Theatre, Nottingham	May	13th
<b>Point of View No. 3</b>		
News Theatre, Nottingham	May	27th
<b>Point of View No. 5</b>		
News Cinema, Aberdeen	May	27th
Classic Cinema, South Croydon	"	23rd
<b>Point of View No. 6</b>		
News Theatre, Newcastle	May	6th
Victoria Station News Theatre, London	"	23rd
Worlds News Theatre, Praed Street, London	"	6th
<b>Point of View No. 7</b>		
Tatler Theatre, Manchester	May	6th
<b>Roads Across Britain</b>		
News Cinema, Aberdeen	May	20th
Tatler Theatre, Manchester	"	6th
<b>These Children are Safe</b>		
Academy Cinema, Oxford Street, London	May	6th
<b>The Londoners</b>		
News Cinema, Aberdeen	May	20th
<b>Weather Flight</b>		
News Theatre, Leeds	May	6th
Tatler Theatre, Manchester	"	13th
News Theatre, Newcastle	"	27th
<b>Wings Over Empire</b>		
News Theatre, Leeds	May	13th
Tatler Theatre, Manchester	"	20th

## ANTI-GOSSIP FILMS REVIEWED

✓ *All Hands, Dangerous Comment and Now You're Talking.* Production: Ealing Film Studios. Producer: Michael Balcon. Director: John Paddy Carstairs. Distribution: M.G.M. Running Time: 10 minutes each. Sponsored by the Ministry of Information.

CARELESS talk gives away vital secrets, and these three Anti-Gossip films, set against the background of scientific research, of the Air Force, and of the Navy, are intended to show how easily it can happen, and how disastrous the consequences may be. The careless talk of a fiancée, a waitress, a man in a pub—the careless talk of *you* and *me* may cause destruction and death. Death, it may be, for the friends and relations of that same waitress, fiancée and man in the pub—destruction and death for *us*. This warning is to be hammered into our heads at ten minutes a time. Given this task, the story must be simple, the settings real, and the emotions aroused must be strong enough to shock idle tongues into discretion.

The stories are simple enough. A laboratory worker handling secret guns brought for examination from a wrecked German plane, boasts about it in a pub, and is overheard by a spy. As a result the laboratory is blown up.

A young pilot, his feelings hurt at being left out of a surprise raid on Germany (although finally he is sent) complains to his fiancée, who tells her friend, who chatters at a cocktail bar. The barman passes on information to a pin-table proprietor, who passes it on to Germany and fifty enemy planes await the bombers. Fortunately this time, the young lady is also overheard by two officers, the barman is arrested and the raiders recalled in the nick of time.

A romantic waitress overhears a sailor tell his

girl that his boat is due to leave Portsmouth at nine o'clock. The waitress in sympathetic distress, gossips to the café proprietress, who passes the news to a little man in a cinema, who reports to a cliff-dwelling butterfly collector, who signals to a U-boat commander, who torpedoes the ship.

So much for the stories. They are exciting and move fast. But could not the settings have been more real, the characters more life-like? The whole effect in films of this kind may be spoilt if they seem to take place, not in real pubs, or cocktail bars, but on conventional studio sets with the old familiar faces playing the old familiar parts. There are, too, some painfully self-conscious touches. The spy who wants to tell his boss that the raid will be on Bender Dam says, "I've been on a *bender*", and then "damn!", as the ball in the pin-table goes wrong. The café proprietress sadistically watches a plate slipping into a basin as she hears of the sinking of the *Cambridge*. Another spy is discovered pinning a butterfly into his collection, and there is the picture of the loved one waiting to be smashed at the ominous moment. These embellishments are unnecessary. And in real life such things just do not happen.

Somehow—and I think it was due to this unreality—the danger of death and destruction for *us* is not really brought home. These are not *our* workers and pilots and sailors who are killed, it is not *our* country whose war secrets are vital, it is not *our* careless talk.

The films represent the most important job of public instruction through the cinemas which has yet been attempted in this country. That they also provide exciting entertainment is evidence that the fundamental production policy is sound. In any similar project in the future it will not be difficult to achieve a more authentic treatment.

## WORLD FILM NEWS

### A Limited Number of Bound Volumes for Sale

Volume 1	£2 0 0
Volume 2	£1 10 0
Volume 3	£1 0 0

### Single Copies

Volume 1	3/6
Volume 2	2/6
Volume 3	2/-

(Issues No. 2 of Volume 1 and No. 6 of Volume 2 are no longer available.)

Obtainable from **FILM CENTRE, 34 SOHO SQUARE, W.1**



## SOME BOOKS ABOUT FILMS

**The African and the Cinema.** L. A. Notcutt and G. C. Latham. *Edinburgh House Press*. 1937. 3s. 6d.

**America at the Movies.** Margaret Thorp. *Yale University Press*. 1940. \$2.75.

**The Censor, the Drama, and the Film, 1900-1934.** Dorothy Knowles. *Allen & Unwin*. 1934. 7s. 6d.

**The Cinema Today.** D. A. Spencer and H. D. Waley. *Sir Humphrey Milford and Oxford University Press*. 1940. 4s. 6d.

**Cinema and Television.** Stuart Legg and Robert Fairthorne. *Longmans, Green & Co.* 1939. 3s. 6d.

**Documentary Film.** Paul Rotha. Preface by John Grierson. *Faber & Faber*. 1939. 12s. 6d.

**Early Films.** A selected catalogue of films 1896 to 1934 still available in Great Britain, with historical notes. Arthur Vesselo. *British Film Institute*. 1939. 2s. 6d.

**Film.** Rudolf Arnheim. *Faber & Faber*. 1933. 15s.

**Film Acting.** V. I. Pudovkin. *Newnes*. 1935. 7s. 6d.

**Film and the Theatre.** Allardyce Nicholl. Contains a bibliography of 1,000 books, articles and periodicals published in Great Britain, U.S.A., France, Germany, Italy, Spain and U.S.S.R. from 1913 to 1935. *Harrop*. 1936. 7s. 6d.

**Film Technique.** V. I. Pudovkin. *Newnes*. 1933. 3s. 6d.

**Footnotes to the Film.** Essays by Alfred Hitchcock, Robert Donat, Basil Wright, Graham Greene, Alberto Cavalcanti, John Betjeman, Maurice Jaubert, Paul Nash, John Grierson, Alexander Korda, Basil Dean, Maurice Kann, Elizabeth Bowen, Sidney Bernstein, Alistair Cooke, Forsyth Hardy, R. S. Lambert and Charles Davy (Editor). 1937. 18s.

**Garbo and the Nightwatchman.** Film criticism by Robert Herring, Don Herold, John Marks, Meyer Levin, Robert Forsythe, Graham Greene, Otis Ferguson, Cecilia Ager and Alistair Cooke (Editor). *Cape*. 1937. 7s. 6d.

**The History of Motion Pictures.** Bardeche and Brasillach. (Translation and notes by Iris Barry.) *Allen & Unwin*. 18s.

**Movie Parade.** Paul Rotha. *Studio*. 1936. 10s. 6d. (remaindered at 5s.)

**Movies for the Millions.** Gilbert Seldes. *Batsford*. 1937. 7s. 6d. (remaindered at 2s. 6d.)

**Reports on Teaching Films.** History, Science, Foreign Languages, 1937. 6d. each. Geography, 1938. 6d. Physical Education, 1938. 1s. Religion, 1938. 6d. *British Film Institute*.

**The Rise of the American Film.** Lewis Jacobs. *Harcourt Brace (New York)*. 1939. \$4.50.

## CORRESPONDENCE

SIR: Permit me to draw your attention to an error in the April issue of your paper. You publish a review of our two reel comedy, *The Backyard Front*, under "New Documentary Films", whereas the film is not a documentary film at all. Consequently, to regard it as such, and seek to judge it from the standpoint of the documentalist has naturally resulted in a review which misrepresents the production, and its purpose. Furthermore, I observe the review has been written by an anonymous farmer. The policy of securing opinions of various lay specialists, on documentary films, may be sound, but such inexperienced critics should not be asked to pass judgment on films which do not happen to be documentaries.

However, the views expressed are so destructive and misleading, that it is necessary to counteract them. First, the farmer states the film fails in both its objects, which, he presumes, are to encourage vegetable cultivation, and instruct the unskilled. The objects of the film are to entertain, and to offer a reminder of the value of garden space in these days, and it has proved an *unqualified success* in both respects. It has been very widely booked, to an extent far greater than the distribution usually achieved by a documentary film. Second, the farmer says it is regrettable that a chance to give information has been lost, to accommodate music-hall horseplay. That is the result of erroneously regarding the film as a documentary, the accepted function of which is to give information, often to the exclusion of everything else—invariably resulting in such films reaching a *minimum* number of people. This desire to give information, an ability to offer it only in a serious, mirthless, cold-comfort-farm sort of manner is possibly all-satisfying to documentalists, but they should know that their methods cannot be applied to all productions which happen to come under the category of "shorts". But the farmer goes even further, and declares the meagre information in the film is not only incomplete but inaccurate. May I say, therefore, that the amount of information included is exactly the right amount, that it is perfectly accurate, and that it has been most carefully checked by numerous experts, including, of course, Mr Middleton.

The nature of this review leads me to hope that the farmer knows more of farming than he does about entertainment; obviously he was asked to step into a world of which he is understandably ignorant. I am sure he would not expect a producer of comedies, or a distributor, to be capable of writing a criticism on his methods of farming. Perhaps, if he visited a cinema showing *The Backyard Front*, he would realise the value of the film, and also learn a little about the art of projecting indirect reminder propaganda in a form entirely divorced from documentary production. The inclusion of this film under "New Documentary Films" tends to suggest what I have often declared in the past, that even documentalists are uncertain what a documentary film really is—or isn't. Although

the farmer was "not amused" at our comedy, we have laughed a great deal at the concluding paragraph of his review:—

"and when Mr Dampier exhibits his own heap composed mostly of broken crockery and worn out saucepans, it is not considered worth while to point out that these things should never on any account be thrown on the compost heap."

The farmer forgot that Mr Dampier also threw his bowler hat on the heap in the hope that all intelligent gardeners would do the same after seeing the film.

ANDREW BUCHANAN

Director of Production,  
*British Films Ltd.*

[Mr Buchanan's film, *Backyard Front*, was commissioned by the Ministry of Agriculture.—Ed.]

SIR: I am very glad to have the DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER, but I regret *World Film News*, which I thought was the cleverest attempt at "culture without tears" I have seen. I gave my copies to the Hamilton Public Library and you will be interested to know that they were worn to shreds. They looked like conventional film magazines and people innocently picked them up expecting the usual fan magazine (at least that is my theory) and, I trust, inadvertently absorbed a more critical attitude.

We've been disappointed these last two years in not being able to get the new British documentaries (which are very popular with our members), but some have at last arrived and we are having a whole programme of documentaries in April.

We did manage to get *North Sea* last autumn. But why could it not be shown commercially? Can't anything be done to get better distribution of good English films both fiction and non-fiction in Canada? The public have been prejudiced by poor films and have had little chance to see the good ones of the last few years, and I presume the theatres don't want to show them as they are tied to the American producers, but it does seem a pity that the outstanding documentaries at least can't be shown. Of course the American ones, except the *March of Time*, aren't shown either. Not even *The River*.

FREDA WALDON

National Film Society of Canada  
(Hamilton Branch)

### U.S. SUBSCRIPTION RATES

To

### DOCUMENTARY NEWS LETTER

Twelve Months - \$1.00

Six Months - 50 cents.

Payable to

AMERICAN FILM CENTER INC.

45 ROCKEFELLER PLAZA

NEW YORK N.Y.



## FILMS WITHOUT STARS

---

CINEMA AUDIENCES will listen to anyone except a bore. Because a subject is important to a man who is making a picture it doesn't always follow that an audience will be entertained by it.

WE KNOW SOMETHING ABOUT ENTERTAINMENT value . . . and film stars. In the past few years such artists as Freddie Bartholomew, Frances Day, Henry Hall, Clapham and Dwyer, Stanley Holloway, Leslie Henson, Sydney Howard, Vera Pearce, Debroy Somers, Claude Hulbert, Charlie Kunz, Flotsam and Jetsam, Billy Mayerl, Fay Compton, Nelson Keys, Inga Anderson, Polly Ward, Stainless Stephen and—of course—some of Mr. Cochran's Young Ladies have appeared in films made at Merton Park.

THESE FILMS have set us a standard in entertainment value which we apply to all films designed for the general public.

A FILM WITHOUT FILM STARS must still entertain if it is to achieve the objects for which it has been made.

---

MERTON PARK STUDIOS LIMITED



# **WHERE DO YOU SEE PROPAGANDA FILMS?**

**IF THEY ARE  
STRAND PRODUCTIONS  
—AT YOUR  
LOCAL CINEMAS!**

THERE ARE OVER FORTY STRAND FILMS NOW  
IN DISTRIBUTION. EACH OF THESE WILL BOOK  
TO AN AVERAGE OF 500 CINEMAS

"MEN OF AFRICA," A THREE-REEL STRAND FILM, IS  
BOOKED AS SECOND FEATURE AT THE LEICESTER  
SQUARE THEATRE—APRIL 19th—MAY 3rd, 1940

"THESE CHILDREN ARE SAFE," A TWO-REEL STRAND  
FILM, IS BOOKED FOR A FOUR WEEKS' SEASON  
AT THE ACADEMY CINEMA, OXFORD STREET

---

## **THE STRAND FILM COMPANY LTD.**

DONALD TAYLOR, *Managing Director*

5a UPPER ST. MARTIN'S LANE, LONDON, W.C.2

MERTON PARK STUDIOS, 269 KINGSTON ROAD, LONDON, S.W.19